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MENNONITES IN HISTORY



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April 23, 1938

*MENNONITES
IN HISTORY*

BY
C. HENRY SMITH

PUBLISHED BY
MENNONITE BOOK AND TRACT SOCIETY
SCOTSDALE, PA.
1907

AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED IN PHILADELPHIA

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INTRODUCTORY

The contents of this little volume is composed of an address delivered by the author at Philadelphia, Pa., June 24, 1906. By request of the editors and publishers of the Gospel Witness, it was prepared and published in that paper a few months ago. The facts concerning the experiences, and the impress made by the Mennonite people on the religious, and subsequently on the political world, are told in such a fair, faithful and striking manner that it has been considered worthy of a place in the libraries of all who are interested in the history of religion, and is therefore published in book form.

The reader will note the purpose of this address in the first sentence of the book. It is not to be a "History of the Mennonites," but a glimpse of the place occupied by the "Mennonites in History." The author has been true to this state-

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ment. He has briefly, yet faithfully and in a critical, careful manner, traced the history of that portion of Europe and America in which the Mennonites figure, from the time the sect became prominent, early in the sixteenth century, down to the present time: showing the effect their faith, integrity, manner of life, and their faithful adherence to the teachings of the Word of God have had on the history of other denominations, and also national issues, where their influence was felt.

Several points of importance in the history of the Mennonite people in general are vividly portrayed and clearly proven in this treatise: 1. The Mennonites were the first body of religious people of modern times to advocate the doctrine of Nonresistance as taught in the New Testament, and apply it in literal, practical ways to every-day life. They antedate the Quakers, German Baptists and other denominations advocating the doctrine. 2. They are one among the few religious denominations still adhering to this distinguishing characteristic of the literal followers of the Lord Jesus

Christ. 3. They are distinguished as a people of frugal habits, sterling character, simple devotion and unpretentious disposition as pertaining to worldly honor and greatness. 4. That separation from the world in dress and manner of life; and non-affiliation with the world in politics, the secret lodge and other alliances that would tend to destroy their individuality and spirituality as disciples of the lowly Nazarene, has been rigidly adhered to by the primitive body. They have hitherto been a "peculiar people, zealous of good works."

In dealing with commendable qualities, the author has not been blind to their mistakes. One of the saddest and most hurtful weaknesses of the church has been the lack of the aggressive spirit. By taking a conservative position they were less exposed to the dangers that necessarily come across the path of those who push out into the open battle; but it also afforded opportunity for outside forces to win away the young and those most exposed to foreign influences. The Mennonites have lost much because of this hitherto prevailing disposition. This, however, is no longer

absolutely true of the denomination. Advances are being rapidly made along the line of education and better teaching. The Bible and the doctrines of the church are better understood; evangelistic and mission work and all lines of religious activity are receiving more attention and the church has become at least conservatively aggressive.

The question naturally arises, and demands the attention and serious consideration of all faithful Mennonites, Will we, in this age of advancement, continue to live the life of simplicity, separation from the world and faithful devotion to the doctrines of the Bible and the church, for which our forefathers, rather than recant, suffered the death of the martyr? The contents of this volume should inspire every reader to live more nearly the life of our blessed Master, and not only cling to the faith taught and defended by our forefathers, but to "teach others also," and continue the building of a church, glorious for its primitive purity, faithful adherence to and living exemplification of the "faith once delivered to the saints."

D. H. BENDER.

Mennonites in History

I wish to speak to you briefly tonight on the "Mennonites in History," not the "History of the Mennonites," which is something entirely different. I use the term history here in the conventional sense. I mean by it that continuous current of events, including the best of human feeling and thought and action which all through its course has determined the civilization of the world, and which has made our life today, in all its aspects, what it is.

There have been times when the narrower and less conspicuous stream of Mennonite history has come into contact with the larger current. Where these contacts have taken place, and what their influence has been upon the main current of events is the subject I propose to discuss.

Most modern scholars in church his-

tory are agreed that the Mennonites are both the *lineal* and the *spiritual* successors to the peaceful, Swiss type of Anabaptists. Some years ago it was the fashion among our historians to locate our ancestry among the Waldenses. Some even attempted to establish through the various mediaeval sects of the Waldenses, Anabaptists and Mennonites an unbroken chain of apostolic succession from the very days of Christ Himself. I have no time here to discuss origins, but let me say in passing, that this hypothesis, beautiful in theory, is still nothing but a theory, and that there is very little evidence to substantiate its claims. The exact truth likely is that the so-called Anabaptist movement was a direct result of the Lutheran and Zwinglian revolution, and that into the movement were swept many Waldenses and other dissenting sects. By the year 1536, most of the leaders of the movement had either been killed or banished, and now the leadership was assumed by

Menno Simon, a converted Catholic priest, who thus became the organizer of an old, and not the founder of a new religious movement.

Gradually the term "Anabaptist," "Täufer," or "Wiedertäufer" was dropped and that of "Mennonite" took its place. Other religious denominations today are proud to claim the honor of descent from these once despised Anabaptists. But I think it is safe to say that the Mennonites alone are the actual lineal descendants of the followers of Grebel, Mantz, Denk and Hubmeyer. And they alone have maintained the doctrine and practices; the spirit, the literature and the very songs of the old Anabaptists.

The modern Baptists claim with the Mennonites a joint honor in this exclusive succession. Most of their historians also claim Menno Simon as one of the early leaders of their church. Although there is, in my opinion, more difference than similarity between the mod-

ern Baptist and the European Anabaptist of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet there is no doubt but that the Baptists owe much to their early contact with the Mennonites at Amsterdam.

It is well known that Dutch Anabaptists and Mennonites were driven from Holland to seek shelter in England all through the sixteenth century. (*) It is also well known that the Dutch were welcomed by the English because of their great skill in the art of weaving, and through them England underwent a great industrial revolution. The eastern countries along the English coast literally swarmed with Dutch artisans and refugees.

Among these refugees were many Mennonites and Anabaptists, or Separatists, who believed among other things that the state had no right whatever to dictate regarding matters of religion,

* Religious Liberty, by Henry M. King, p. 32-35. See also Influence of the Netherlands upon the American Republic, by W. E. Griffis.

and that church membership must be made up of the regenerated only, those baptized upon confession of faith. Religion, in other words, was a matter between man and his God, and not between man and the state. Such were the men who invaded England, and it is not at all surprising to learn that with the industrial revolution was sown the seed of a wholesome religious discontent which finally led to the establishing of separate congregations all over southeastern England, and ultimately to the planting of religious freedom upon the North American continent by the Pilgrims in 1620.

Among the prominent centers of Separatists during the last quarter of the sixteenth century were London, Gainsboro, Scrooby and Norwich.

Independent religious worship, however, was not yet dreamt of by those in authority in England. By 1597 the little church of 57 members in London had been cast into the city jails. Several of

the leaders were hanged, but the rest were allowed to find their way to Amsterdam, where they hoped to find congenial comradeship and religious liberty. Here a congregation was organized with Francis Johnson as pastor.

The church at Gainsboro was in charge of one John Smythe. He, too, with his flock, came to Amsterdam. Here he joined the church already organized by Johnson. (*) But soon differed from them, as he himself says, on this important point: namely, "the importance of baptism being administered as a sign of admission into the church, to adults, or persons of competent age to understand its meaning, and not to infants who happened to be the seed of the faithful." This was practically Mennonite doctrine, and we soon find Smythe associating himself with Hans de Rys and Lubbert Gerrits, celebrated ministers in the large Mennonite congregation at Am-

* Henry Barrow and the Exiled Church at Amsterdam, by F. J. Powicke, p. 252. Also Barclay.

sterdam. Soon after he and forty-one other members of the Separatist church signed a confession of faith drawn up by Hans de Rys and Gerrits and thus virtually joined the Mennonite congregation. A part of this congregation later returned to England, and is claimed by the Baptists today as the first of their churches on English soil.

Of the early Baptist churches established in England, Barclay has this to say: "These churches, English and Dutch Mennonites, corresponded with one another and the English agreed to refer their differences to the decision of the Dutch Mennonites." In 1626 there were churches corresponding with the Waterlander Mennonites of Amsterdam in London, Lincoln, Sarum, Coventry and Tiverton. Later a slight difference occurred regarding the doctrine of non-resistance, which the English Baptists finally discarded entirely. Barclay continues: "We may therefore conclude that the first Arminian Baptist churches in

England were really Mennonites, and at least in some of these churches, the doctrines, practices and discipline of the Mennonites were practiced."

Of the remaining Separatist congregations, the one at Scrooby under Robinson and Brewster, I wish to speak but briefly. But let me say that this church also found its way to Amsterdam, became identified with the Amsterdam church and in this way came under Mennonite influence. Robinson and a small band of followers in 1609 left for Leyden and from here it will be remembered they came to America as the celebrated Pilgrim Fathers in 1620. This little band of Mayflower colonists has since been lauded to the skies. Plymouth Rock has become immortal. But little is said of the Mennonites who, in all the essentials of their faith, were the predecessors of these Pilgrim Fathers by nearly a whole century, and from whom the Pilgrims may have drawn much of their inspiration and religious and political faith.

Likewise with the Baptists. To them is given the credit, and rightly so, I think, of having done more than any other religious denomination to secure complete separation of church and state and full religious freedom in Colonial America. But it is not so generally known that the original Baptist churches in England grew directly out of the Mennonite congregation at Amsterdam, and that they also owe to Mennonite influence the two cardinal principles of their faith, namely, the complete elimination of state from religion and a church membership limited to the regenerated.

This has always been characteristic of Mennonite history. Mennonites have always been a quiet, peaceful and unassuming people, and thus whatever influence they may have exerted upon the political and religious life of their day would be likely to escape public notice. But that they were pioneers in the struggle for religious liberty can not be doubted. They antedate the Puritan, the Bap-

tist, the Quaker and all other religious agents that did so much to secure the free play of conscience upon English and American soil. None of these agents have made a single addition to Mennonite doctrine on this subject, and none have suffered more than the Mennonites for the sake of conscience.

This struggle inaugurated by the Anabaptists and Mennonites and followed later by other religious societies has not yet run its course. The final victory has not been won. America is the only nation on the face of the earth today in which absolute religious liberty is enjoyed and in which a religious conscience is respected. We, as Mennonites, have special reason to thank God for free America. In Europe conditions are different. In the Roman Catholic countries of the south the people are still under the blighting influences and hopeless thralldom of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. But in northern and more enlightened Europe a brighter day is dawning. In

England the Free churches have been fighting for centuries a valiant battle against ecclesiastical tyranny. Bit by bit they have gained ground until now they, too, are almost within sight of the promised land of religious liberty. In France, during the past year, great strides have been taken in the same direction, and thus the struggle must continue. But the time will surely come, though yet far distant, perhaps, when the principles of religious toleration, for which the Mennonites lived and gladly died, will prevail throughout the civilized world.

In still another movement must the Mennonites be considered as pioneers—that for the total abolition of warfare between Christian nations. In this direction they are still in advance of the age. The Mennonites were the first to follow the Swiss Anabaptists in a literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, and especially of the direct command, “Thou shalt not kill.” This they applied to nations as well as to individuals, and

it was their refusal to bear arms in times of war that brought upon them the oppression and persecution which finally compelled them to emigrate to this country in the latter part of the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth centuries. Even now they are regarded as idealists, as bigoted literalists, as vain dreamers.

War, men say, is a necessity and can never be eliminated from our civilization. Upon one question we can all agree, that war is an evil, but is it a necessary evil? How can this evil best be eliminated? By fostering the war spirit; by unduly glorifying the war hero; by training our young men to be soldiers and our young women to admire brass buttons and gold braided epaulets? Or by cultivating the arts of peace; by following the command of the Master who said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you?"

That Christ Himself taught His disciples to lead the non-resistant life, there can be no question. The whole spirit of His message to the world is "peace on earth and good will toward men." The early Christians refused to serve in the Roman armies and it was a common saying, "I am a Christian, therefore I cannot fight."

But with the so-called conversion of Constantine, a great calamity befell the Christian church. It now became an ally of the state and as such it had to fight the battles of the state. Henceforth it became a fighting church. So deeply has it been imbued with this fighting spirit that today the Christian church is often found the most urgent of all those who demand war. But a better day is coming. If there is any truth in history, any power in the Gospel, the day when universal peace shall reign throughout the world is only a question of time. The last half century has seen great progress in the growth of the peace sen-

timent. All the best interests of our civilization demand the abolition of war. Commerce cannot afford war. And it is significant that all of our own wars during the last century have been bitterly opposed by the commercial sections of the country. In 1812 so great was the opposition to the war with England that a convention was called at Hartford at which serious threats of secession were made if the war were to continue. Our recent war with Spain was brought on not by the commercial interests of the east, but very largely by the farmers and laboring men of the great middle west who, economically, had less to lose. Among the most urgent advocates of peace today are the chambers of commerce and business organizations all over the country. War is expensive and contrary to all economic interests. It is destructive of human life, and opposed to all our humanitarian instincts. Slowly but surely the Gospel in its purity and simplicity is making its way among the

people. For all these reasons we feel confident that the reign of universal peace is sure to come.

The great activity of various peace societies during the past ten years is a fruitful sign of better times to come. There are today in active operation national peace societies in nearly all the civilized countries of the Northern Hemisphere. These societies are carrying on an active, educative campaign against warfare. Each year delegates of these various organizations meet in an International conference. The movement has reached our legislative assemblies, thus entrenching itself at the very heart of the official power which decides questions of peace and war. The Interparliamentary Union is made up of the legislators from all civilized countries. Each year they, too, meet in conference to discuss methods of promoting peace.

Of all signs of the times, however, the most significant was the Hague Conference held in 1898. This was the first

time in the world's history that such a body gathered together for such a purpose. Although not much was accomplished, yet the event was of great significance in this that it indicates in which direction the world is moving.

These, then, are the forces making for peace. But let us remember that after all it is through the Christian church that the Golden Age must be ushered in. It is only when men's lives are transformed through the simple Gospel and gentle spirit of Jesus Christ that they will learn the art of war no more, and will "beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks."

But what has all this to do with the Mennonites in history? It proves that their position on the subject of warfare is sound and that their ideal is gradually becoming a reality.

The Mennonite Church was the earliest of modern peace societies. Several others followed later and all owed much

of their doctrine and spirit to Mennonite influence. Just how and where George Fox got his religious principles may be a question. But it is known that he was familiar with Mennonite doctrine. Very early in his religious experience he visited Norwich, which we remember as the center of Dutch Anabaptist influence. He preached frequently in the Baptist churches in that region. When he traveled in Holland and Germany he first visited the Mennonite communities and was everywhere welcomed by them. They had almost everything in common. In fact the similarity between the Quakers and Mennonites is so great, and Quakerism introduced so much that was at that time new in England and so much that was old in Holland that one cannot help but conclude that the two were closely and vitally connected.

In America they ran the same course. Gloried together in their triumphs and shared their sufferings. They fought side by side in Colonial Pennsylvania, Vir-

ginia and Maryland for exemption from military service and the substitution of the affirmation for the oath, with perhaps this difference, that the Mennonites, being the more passive, allowed the Quakers to do most of the fighting.

The Dunkards, perhaps, would claim very little relationship with the Mennonites, yet here, too, the similarity in every detail is so great that we are forced to conclude that the Dunkards drew many of their principles from Mennonite sources. Alexander Mack traveled far and wide visiting many churches before organizing his own. He found no other so near to his liking as that of the Mennonites. (*) But in one point of doctrine he differed from them—Baptism. The Mennonites practiced pouring, but Mack, convinced that immersion was the only scriptural mode of baptism, could not cast his lot with them. Therefore, he and a few of his followers performed

* See Brumbaugh, *History of the Brethren*.

their own baptismal services, baptizing one another. Dunkard churches were soon found in Mennonite communities. Crefeld, which was already a center of Mennonite and Quaker influence, soon contained also a congregation of Dunkards. Here some of the Mennonites, who, by the way, have always furnished fairly good material for proselyters, went over to the new faith. Before 1730 almost the entire colony had emigrated to Pennsylvania, settling in Germantown, which, like Crefeld, in Europe, became the seat of the peace sects in America. Here again Dunkards and Mennonites were likely to be found in the same communities.

The other non-resistant societies which arose in Europe and early came to Pennsylvania, namely, the Moravians and the Schwenkfelders, were contemporaneous with the Mennonites and were, like them, a part of the Anabaptist movement.

In fact, so closely did all the peace sects resemble the Mennonites and so in-

timately were they associated in their history that with the exception of the last two, we may fittingly call the Mennonite church the mother of all modern peace societies. (*)

There is another and more obvious sense in which the Mennonites have been pioneers in the onward progress of civilization. Their industry and thrift have always attracted attention. Mosheim, the historian, says of the Mennonites in his day, that they "owned the finest land, drove the finest equipages, lived in the best houses and were in every way the most industrious people in Holland."

* For the facts regarding the relation of the Mennonites to the Baptists, Quakers, Pilgrims, etc., I am indebted to the following writers: W. E. Griffis, *The Influence of the Netherlands on the American Republic*.

Barclay—*The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*.

M. G. Brumbaugh—*History of the Brethren*.

Campbell—*The Puritans in England, Netherlands and America*.

Powicke—*Henry Barrow and the Exiled Church at Amsterdam*.

King—*Religious Liberty*.

Morton Dexter—*Story of the Pilgrims*.

The same can as truthfully be said today of the Mennonites of Pennsylvania and in other places where they have settled in large numbers. Lancaster county has often been called the "Garden spot of America," and by actual statistics it was shown a few years ago to be the wealthiest agricultural county in this country. It was because of their thrifty habits and successful methods that kings and rulers have often invited Mennonites who were persecuted to settle in their own territories upon waste and unsettled lands. With these invitations usually went promises of religious freedom. In 1710 Frederick of Prussia invited the Swiss Mennonites, who were then being driven out of Switzerland to occupy lands in his kingdom which had been devastated by his wars with the French. Many went to Prussia. A little later George I of England invited the persecuted Mennonites of Germany and Switzerland to emigrate to his own unoccupied lands west of the Alleghenies where they were to have

religious freedom. Each family, furthermore, was to have 50 acres free, and for a period of 10 years the privilege to till "as much land as any one wishes without payment of any rent."

Although many came to America, I do not know of any who took advantage of this offer. By 1786 the king of Prussia evidently had forgotten the promises made by his predecessor in 1710 and many of the privileges granted the Mennonites at that time were withdrawn. Catharine of Russia hereupon invited them to settle on her own unoccupied lands in Southeastern Russia, again promising them freedom of worship, exemption from military service, traveling expenses to Russia and a certain portion of land exempt from taxation for a limited number of years. Thousands of Prussian Mennonites left for the new asylum. But by 1874 they lost their privileges here also and as a result they emigrated almost enmasse, to our own Northwest, then, too, a wilderness, but

now, through their own patient labor and skillful management, made to blossom like a garden of roses.

Thus the Mennonites of Europe during the last two centuries have spent much of their time in subduing virgin lands, in establishing new homes and planting their religion in new places.

In America, likewise, Mennonites were found in the front ranks of pioneers. In the westward expansion of the American people the Mennonites have always been found among the earliest settlers. In the Shenandoah Valley in 1754 they were among the first to brave the dangers from Indian raids. In Canada in 1800 they were the earliest settlers in Waterloo county, Ontario, and bought an entire township of raw land directly from the king of England. In Ohio, early in the nineteenth century the Mennonites came to establish homes almost before the Indians had vacated their lands, and they were driven back to Pennsylvania by Indian depredations.

In Illinois they settled along the banks of the Illinois river in 1830, just ten years after the first log cabin in that region was put up. And so all through the West and Northwest, in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Washington, Oregon and recently in Alberta, wherever new lands were opened up there the Mennonite was among the first to put up his log cabin or his sod shanty.

This pioneer life, this westward expansion of the church, has not been without its significant features nor without its influence upon the body as a whole. Just as the westward movement of civilization has kept the race young and hopeful, so the pioneer life of the Mennonite church has kept her, with all her conservative instincts, yet a church of material prosperity and spiritual progress.

I have spoken of the Mennonites as pioneers in several religious and social movements. This naturally leads to an inquiry into the reasons why they alone

should so early stand for principles which were in advance of the age, but which are now being regarded more and more as sound and in keeping with the spirit of progress. The explanation lies very largely in the fact that the faith of the Mennonites and their Anabaptist predecessors was that of the common man. In this respect it was very much like primitive Christianity in the early days. Christianity began as a religion of the common man and for many years never got beyond that. In fact I am inclined to believe that there is where all religion and religious reform must begin. It works its way from the bottom to the top, never from the top to the bottom.

What, then, were the characteristics of these common men in the early sixteenth century? In the first place they were well read in the Holy Scriptures. The Anabaptists, especially, knew how to quote passages from the Bible to the consternation of their opponents. Some of them, it is said, learned whole books by

heart so that they could quote them verbatim. This was just the time when the Bible was becoming accessible to the common people in Germany. Many editions appeared in both the German and Dutch languages before Luther's translation. To the contents of this hitherto sealed book the people now had access, and they came with simple minds and believing hearts. Minds that were entirely free from preconceived theological prejudices which might have hidden from them the plain and simple message of the Gospel. Much of our theology even today is very much like the traditions of the Jews in Christ's time, likely to supersede the Word of God itself as a standard of faith.

Theology, after all, is only the accumulation of what men have thought about the mysteries of God, expressed in set phrases and in a stereotyped terminology. The form is often taken for the content. Men think they have laid hold of the truth of God when they have merely

learned how to use the vocabulary of the theologian. Of this fault the Mennonites have always been singularly free. They have often been accused of being narrow and bigoted, but as a matter of fact, in creed and dogma, they have been the most liberal of all denominations. Human tradition in matters of faith counts for nothing. The Bible alone is the all-sufficient standard and infallible guide, and each individual is left to decide for himself how the Bible shall be interpreted.

Finally, the common man was enabled to live out the plain commands of the Master more consistently than those higher in station, because he was not tempted like they, to wield power and thus to make compromises with the temporal authorities. We saw the demoralizing effect of the union of church and state in the time of Constantine. History repeated itself in the Reformation. Both Luther and Zwingli in the earlier days of their career were radically opposed to all

interference on the part of the civil magistrates in matters of religion. But as their movement grew, both of them became ambitious to be leaders in a national religious establishment and so both urged the extermination of the Anabaptists and Mennonites whose only sin was that they had begged for the privilege of worshipping God as their own consciences dictated. The Mennonites, fortunately, never got into power and thus were never tempted to force their own religious convictions upon others. Had the *opportunity* and the *temptation* come to them it is, perhaps, difficult to tell what their subsequent history might have been.

It may seem to you that I have unduly magnified the position which our forefathers occupied in history and that I have overdrawn their influence upon their day. I have tried to confine myself to the realm of fact and do not think I have colored the picture too highly. But there is another side to the picture and it

certainly would not be the part of wisdom were we to deliberately close our eyes to our past mistakes.

The direct influence of the Mennonites upon society has been limited very largely to the early days of their history. In America they have touched history very little. Certainly less than the Quakers, who, though scarcely greater in numbers, have yet extended an influence upon their times incomparably greater than the Mennonites.

Two causes stand out prominently as contributing to this loss of influence. In the first place the passive spirit has in these later days often been carried to extremes. The nonresistant spirit has frequently become an unaggressive spirit, even in the line of spiritual advancement. After centuries of persecution in Europe we have been too well satisfied in this land of freedom, simply to be left alone, to follow the course of least resistance, totally oblivious to all about us. Here the Quakers have been wiser than we.

They have always been an aggressive missionary society. They have been a positive force in disseminating their principles. Believing in identically the same doctrines, but possessing a much more positive character, they have done infinitely more than the Mennonites to make their impress upon the world. In the exemption from military service and in the substitution of the affirmation for the oath, two civil privileges highly prized by both denominations, the Mennonites of America owe almost all to the Quakers.

This lesson, then, we need to learn from the Quakers: to cultivate a more fervent missionary zeal; to develop a greater respect for our faith and principles; finally, as in the days of old, to embrace a more *positive* nonresistance.

Another source of weakness to the church has been her persistent opposition to higher education. The church has produced great men, and good men, but they have been educated by the schools of

other churches. With no encouragement, no opportunity for work, no congenial associations in the church of their childhood, these men have invariably left the faith of their fathers and have used their strength and influence to build up other organizations.

The service of our own church schools to the church will be to save the young men and women for the old faith.

I am anxious to see the old Mennonite church return once more to her former position of influence and power. Her principles today are exactly what they were 300 years ago. This must ever be said to the credit of the church,—in faith, in doctrine, in practice, the main body has not deviated one jot from that of the fathers. But I am afraid this can not be so truthfully said of her positive influence and spiritual power. Among the causes for this decline I should mention, too slight an appreciation of our principles and too weak a faith in our mission. No individ-

ual can succeed in any worthy enterprise without a certain amount of confidence in his work and plenty of manly respect for himself. What is true of the individual is also true of a body of individuals. The Mennonite church, if she wishes to be useful in the world, must respect herself and the faith she represents. In every country of Europe our forefathers were imprisoned, tortured, or driven into exile. For two hundred years they enjoyed only such civil and religious privileges as the prevailing churches or governments chose to grant them. For two hundred years they lived the life of hunted beasts, not knowing whither to flee for refuge, in constant dread of losing possessions, liberty and even life itself. It was but inevitable that this life of persecution should leave its impress upon their character. Always a lowly and unassuming people, their experiences only deepened the feeling that their rights in this world were but few. The most they dared ask was simply to be left

alone. This conviction became a part of their very beings, and was a part of their bequest to their children. To the present day we feel the effects of this inheritance.

To be an effective force in disseminating our faith we must overcome our inherited tendencies toward self-depreciation and lack of self-confidence. I feel that a knowledge of what the Mennonite church has stood for in the past will help us to gain a greater respect for ourselves. And it is in the hope that I may add my mite toward the attainment of this greater self-respect, that I am glad to speak to you on the "Mennonites in History."

